

National Poison Prevention Week

March 16-22, 1997

EDITOR'S FACT SHEET

1. Q. What is National Poison Prevention Week?

A. Public Law 87-319 authorizes the President to designate annually the third week in March as National Poison Prevention Week. This act of Congress was signed into law on September 16, 1961, by President Kennedy, after which the Poison Prevention Week Council was organized to coordinate this annual event. Congress intended this event as a means for local communities to raise awareness of the dangers of accidental poisonings and to take such preventive measures as the dangers warrant.

2. Q. Is there a special theme for National Poison Prevention Week?

A. Yes, our basic theme is "Children Act Fast...So Do Poisons!" This means that parents must always be watchful when household chemicals or drugs are being used. Many incidents happen when adults are using a product but are distracted (for example, by the telephone or the doorbell) for a few moments. Children act fast, and adults must make sure that household chemicals and medicines are stored away from children at all times. The poster for 1997 bears the following theme: "."

3. Q. If my child eats or drinks a substance that might be a poison, where can I find information on treatment?

A. If you think someone has been poisoned, call your Poison Control Center immediately. There are currently some 100 Poison Control Centers in the United States which maintain information for the physician or the public on recommended treatment for the ingestion of household products and medicines. They are familiar with the toxicity (how poisonous it is) of most substances found in the home or know how to find this information. Their phone number can be found on the inside cover of the yellow or white pages of the telephone directory. Keep the number on your phone.

4. Q. If I find my youngster playing with a bottle of medicine or some household product, how can I tell if he or she has swallowed some and what should I do?

A. Reactions vary, depending on the product. Sometimes the child may vomit; or he or she may appear to be drowsy or sluggish. Some of the substance may remain around the child's mouth and teeth. There may be burns around the lips or mouth from corrosive items; or you may be able to smell the product on the child's breath. If a household chemical has been ingested, follow the first aid instructions on the label and then **get medical advice - even if you suspect, but don't know for sure, that your child has ingested a potentially hazardous product**. Call your Poison Control Center, emergency department, or physician. Place these telephone numbers on your phone.

5. Q. Are there some first aid measures I can take when an ingestion takes place?

A. Remain calm. Not all medicines and household chemicals are poisonous, and not all exposures necessarily result in poisoning. For medicines, call the Poison Control Center or physicians immediately. For household chemical products, follow first aid instructions on the label, then call the Poison Control Center or physician. If unable to contact them, call your local emergency number (911 in most areas) or the operator. Keep emergency numbers listed near the phone before an emergency arises. When you contact the Poison Control Center or other emergency personnel, be prepared to give the facts (described below) to the expert on the other end of the phone. Have the label ready when you call the expert. The label provides information concerning the product's contents and advice on what immediate first aid to perform. This will be useful when giving first aid and when you call the Poison Control Center. Tell the expert:

- The victim's age.
- The victim's weight.
- Existing health conditions or problems.
- The substance involved: was it swallowed, inhaled, absorbed through skin contact, or splashed into the eyes.
- Any first aid which may have been given.
- If the person has vomited.
- Your location, and how long it will take you to get to the hospital.

If medicine has been swallowed, do not give anything by mouth until advised by the Poison Control Center. If chemicals or household products have been swallowed, offer the victim a small amount of water. Then call for professional advice about whether or not you should make the patient vomit. **Always keep on hand at home a one-ounce bottle of syrup of ipecac** for each child or grandchild under age 5 in the home. Use **only** on advice of the Poison Control Center, emergency department, or physician.

6. Q. Why are so many poisonings related to children under 5 years of age?

A. Children under the age of five are in stages of growth and development in which they are constantly exploring and investigating the world around them. This is the way they learn. It is a normal characteristic and should not be discouraged. Unfortunately, what children see and reach for they usually put in their mouths. It is this hazard to which parents must be alerted. As the youngsters' mobility, ingenuity, and capabilities increase, they can reach medicines and household chemicals even if stored up high. For instance, when children are crawling, they can find such products as drain cleaners stored under the kitchen sink and on the floor. As soon as they are able to stand, they can reach such products as furniture polish on low-lying tables, as well as medications in purses on beds. When they start to climb, they can reach medicine on countertops or open the medicine cabinet and get to the medicine. These products should be locked up where possible, out of the child's reach - even when safety packaging is used. Adults should never leave a medicine or household chemical product unattended while in use; children act fast and can get hold of a product and swallow it during the short time while the adult is answering the telephone or doorbell. Advise the caregiver to take the child (or product) with them to answer the phone.

7. Q. Why do we need child-resistant packaging?

A. Although labeling requirements and educational programs have had some effect in reducing the number of childhood ingestions, significant numbers of children are still being poisoned by ingesting household products that can be hazardous, such as medicines (sometimes brought into the child's home by grandparents or other visitors), cleaning products, and solvents. Child-resistant packaging, if used properly, provides an additional barrier to help prevent ingestions.

8. Q. As a parent, how certain can I be regarding the effectiveness of this kind of packaging?

A. While child-resistant packaging provides an increased element of protection, children are going to investigate several different ways of opening a container. If their fingers won't work, their teeth might. It would be impossible to manufacture a package or a closure that would prevent every single child from getting into the contents under all possible circumstances. Therefore, the Poison Prevention Packaging Act requires that packages be difficult for children under 5 years of age to open and obtain a toxic amount within a reasonable time. For example, U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission regulations require that aspirin, and other products, be packaged in special containers which would prevent at least 80% of those children tested from opening the container during a 10-minute test. This requirement means that some children may still be able to open or otherwise obtain a toxic amount. So, keep poisonous substances locked up.

9. Q. How can I use child-resistant packaging properly?

A. Remember these steps: (1) Read the instructions to make it easier to open the packaging. (2) Be sure to resecure the closure tightly. **Never transfer the contents to other containers.** (3) Do not leave loose pills anywhere. (4) Keep medicines and household products (even those with safety caps) out of sight. Use locks or child-resistant latches to secure storage areas. The pharmacist or merchant from whom the product was purchased can teach you how to open and close the packaging, if you have difficulty. Opening and closing becomes easier with practice. While it may take a few additional seconds of your time, those few seconds may save the life of a child who is very dear to you.

10. Q. What kind of products can I expect to find in child-resistant packaging?

A. Aspirin and aspirin-substitutes (acetaminophen), certain types of liquid furniture polish, oil of wintergreen, drain cleaners, oven cleaners, lighter fluids, turpentine, paint solvents, windshield washer solutions, automobile antifreeze, pesticides, oral dosage prescription drugs, iron-containing drugs and dietary supplements, over-the-counter ibuprofen, loperamide (an anti-diarrhea medicine), over-the-counter preparations containing lidocaine and dibucaine (anesthetic medicines), mouthwash containing 3 grams or more of ethanol (alcohol), and over-the-counter naproxen are among the substances required to be in child-resistant packaging.

11. Q. There are no small children in my home. Do I have to use child-resistant packaging?

A. In general, all adults should use child-resistant packaging because young children may visit the adult's home. To benefit people who are elderly or handicapped, the Poison Prevention Packaging Act allows a manufacturer to offer a regulated non-prescription product in one size or package that does not comply with the safety packaging standard and that bears the label statement "This package for households without young children," if that manufacturer also offers the same product in child-resistant packages. Additionally, if a prescription is involved, the purchaser or prescribing physician can request regular, non-child-resistant packaging. However, such requests should be kept to a minimum, since they increase the danger of childhood poisonings. Poisonings have happened when youngsters have visited homes where no children live. Little ones have been poisoned after finding medicine containers left in purses or on bedside tables. Poisonings have happened when older persons carried medicines into homes that have small children. A study conducted for the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission by the American Association of Poison Control Centers found that 23% of the oral prescription drugs that were ingested by children under 5 belonged to someone who did not live with the child. Overall, 17% of the medicines ingested belonged to a grandparent or great-grandparent. This percentage varied from city to city: in Salt Lake City, 9% of the medicines ingested belonged to a grandparent, but in Shreveport, Louisiana, 24% of the medicines ingested belonged to a grandparent. The data suggest that grandparents - and all adults - need to use child-resistant packaging and keep medicines properly secured, away from young children.

12. Q. Is there any evidence that the number of child poisonings has decreased since child-resistant packaging began to be used?

A. Yes. The staff of the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) estimates that child-resistant packaging for aspirin and oral prescription medicine saved the lives of about 700 children since the requirements went into effect in the early 1970s. CPSC analyzed child fatality data for accidental ingestions of aspirin and oral prescription medicines. The death rates for aspirin and oral prescription medicines declined even after taking account of the overall decline in the accidental child death rate from all causes. The study also accounted for changes in per capita product consumption and reductions in the aspirin fatality rate associated with therapeutic overdose. The CPSC study showed that child-resistant packaging reduced the aspirin-related child death rate by up to 0.88 deaths per million children under age 5. The results also showed that special packaging reduced the oral prescription medicine-related death rate by up to 1.27 deaths per million children under age 5. This represents a fatality rate reduction of up to 45 percent from levels that would have been projected in the absence of child-resistant packaging requirements. The estimate of about 700 lives saved relates to aspirin and oral prescription medicines only and does not include additional lives that may have been saved by child-resistant packaging on other products.

There has been a reduction in deaths with all household chemicals and with aspirin products in particular since 1972 (when aspirin was first required to be in child-resistant packaging).

Deaths of Children under Age 5 Involving Household Products

<u>Deaths from all medicines and household chemicals</u>		<u>Deaths from aspirin</u>	
<u>Year</u>	<u># Deaths</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>#Deaths</u>
1972	216	1972	46
1973	149	1973	26
1974	135	1974	24
1975	114	1975	17
1976	105	1976	25
1977	94	1977	11
1978	81	1978	13
1979	78	1979	8
1980	73	1980	12
1981	55	1981	6
1982	67	1982	5
1983	55	1983	7
1984	64	1984	7
1985	56	1985	0
1986	59	1986	2
1987	31	1987	3
1988	42	1988	3
1989	55	1989	2
1990	49	1990	1
1991	62	1991	2
1992	42	1992	0
1993	50	1993	2

Source: National Center for Health Statistics

However, the number of ingestions or exposures to household medicines and chemicals continues to be high. The American Association of Poison Control Centers reports that in 1995 the number of children age 5 and under exposed to potentially poisonous substances was 1,070,497.

13. Q. Why is it dangerous to use cups or soft-drink bottles to hold paint thinner, turpentine, gasoline, or other household chemicals?

A. Children associate cups, soft-drink bottles, and drinking glasses with food and drink. For example, fatalities have been reported when lighter fluid intended for outdoor barbecue fires was poured into such containers and subsequently swallowed by children.

14. Q. Are there any good housekeeping rules I can use to prevent poisonings?

A. (1) Keep all household chemical products and medicines (especially iron pills and food supplements containing iron) out of sight of youngsters and, preferably, locked up when not in use. Medicines and household chemicals on kitchen counters or bathroom surfaces are very accessible to young children.

(2) When these products are in use, never let young children out of your sight - even if you must take them along when answering the telephone or the doorbell.

(3) Store all medicines separately from household products, and store all household chemical products away from food.

(4) Keep items in their original containers.

(5) Leave the original labels on all products, and read the label before using.

- (6) Always leave the light on when giving or taking medicines.
- (7) Avoid taking medicines in front of children, since youngsters tend to imitate grown-ups.
- (8) Refer to medicine as "medicine" - not "candy."
- (9) Clean out the medicine cabinet periodically, and safely dispose of unneeded medicines when the illness for which they were prescribed is over. Pour contents down drain or toilet, and rinse container before discarding.
- (10) Finally, use child-resistant packaging properly - by closing the container securely after use.

15. Q. Is the poinsettia still considered to be extremely toxic?

A. The poinsettia was blamed for a death in 1919; however, recent studies indicate that the plant is not as highly toxic as was thought at that time. It is unlikely that ingestion of a poinsettia would be fatal, although it may cause some gastric irritation and burning in the mouth. Many other plants are toxic also. If any indoor or outdoor plants are ingested, Poison Control Center or medical advice should be sought.

16. Q. Is lead in paint a serious problem if a child should ingest it?

A. In the past, paints could - and did - contain much higher levels of lead than they do now. Since 1971, however, the permissible amount of lead in consumer paint products has been reduced through a series of federal laws and regulations. This reduction also applies to paints or coatings on toys or articles intended for use by children. Children can still, however, become lead poisoned from ingesting chips or breathing dust from old, heavily-leaded paint that is still present on walls and other surfaces in old houses and buildings. Workers and entire families face the same hazard when older homes and buildings are rehabilitated and sanding raises dust as leaded paint is removed from surfaces such as walls, floors, and ceilings.

17. Q. Can miniature "button" batteries present a risk of childhood poisoning?

A. Yes, miniature batteries may cause poisoning if swallowed. The batteries can cause internal burns if they become lodged in the esophagus or intestinal tract. These tiny batteries (used in watches, calculators, cameras, and hearing aids) usually pass through the person without any problem. However, if a miniature battery is swallowed, you should contact your Poison Control Center, your physician, or the National Button Battery Ingestion hotline at 202-625-3333. In order to prevent ingestion of miniature batteries, consumers should keep the batteries out of children's reach and throw away old batteries, securely wrapped, after they have been removed from the appliance.

18. Q. Are adults also at risk when they swallow medicines and household chemicals?

A. Yes, poisonings happen to adults - especially older people - who cannot read labels or who fail to follow instructions. Some people may confuse one medicine for another, especially if the light is not on when they reach for a medicine at night. Others may take too much of a medicine or may mix medicine with alcohol or other substances. Adults should take precautions to avoid poisonings:

- (1) Turn on a light at night and put on your glasses to read the label when you need to take a medicine.
- (2) Always read the label and follow instructions when taking medicines. If any questions arise, consult your physician.
- (3) Never mix medicines and alcohol, and never take more than the prescribed amount of medicine.
- (4) Never "borrow" a friend's medicine or take old medicines.
- (5) Tell your doctor what other medicines you are taking so you can avoid adverse drug interactions.

19. Q. What can consumers do to protect themselves and their families from medicines that have been tampered with?

A. Although most medicines are packaged in tamper-evident packaging, they are not tamper-proof. Each consumer must be alert for the packaging to be protective. Here's how you can help protect yourself and your family:

- (1) **Read the label.** Over-the-counter medicines with safety closures tell you on the label what tamper-evident features you should look for on the package.
- (2) **Inspect the outer packaging.** Look before you buy!
- (3) **Inspect the product itself when you open the package.** Look again before you take it! If it looks suspicious, be suspicious.
- (4) Look for tablets or capsules that are **different in any way** from others in the package.
- (5) Don't use any medicine from a package that shows **cuts, slices, tears**, or other imperfections.
- (6) **Never** take medicine in the dark.

- (7) Read the label and look at the medicine **every time** you take a dose.
- (8) Whenever you suspect something wrong with a medicine or its packaging, take it to the store manager.
- (9) Tamper-evident packaging can help protect you **if you are alert!**

20. Q. What can consumers do to protect children from pesticide-related poisonings?

A. A recent survey by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency regarding pesticide use in and around the home revealed that almost half (47%) of all households with children under the age of 5 had at least one pesticide stored in an unlocked cabinet, and less than 4 feet off the ground (i.e., within reach of children). The survey also found that 75% of households without children under the age of 5 also stored one pesticide within reach of children. This number is especially significant because 13% of all pesticide poisonings occur in homes other than the child's home. Adults should take the following steps to safeguard children from exposures to pesticides:

- (1) Always store pesticides away from children's reach, in a locked cabinet or garden shed.
- (2) Read the label first and follow the directions to the letter, including all precautions and restrictions.
- (3) Before applying pesticides (indoors and outdoors), remove children and their toys from the area and keep them away until it is dry or as recommended by the label.
- (4) Never leave pesticides unattended when you are using them - not even for a few minutes.
- (5) Never transfer pesticides to other containers - children may associate certain containers with food or drink.
- (6) Use child-resistant packaging properly by closing the container tightly after use.
- (7) Alert others to the potential hazard, especially grandparents and caregivers.

21. Q. Where can I get more information on preventing poisonings?

A. See the "List of Materials - 1997" for available resources and their sources of supply. The list can be obtained from Secretary, Poison Prevention Week Council, PO Box 1543, Washington, DC 20013.

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The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission protects the public from any unreasonable risks of injury or death from 15,000 types of consumer products under the agency's jurisdiction. To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury and for information on CPSC's fax-on-demand service, call CPSC's hotline at (800) 638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at (800) 638-8270. Consumers can obtain recall information via Internet gopher services at cpsc.gov or report product hazards to info@cpsc.gov.

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